Letter to the Community 4/7/2020

Welcome to the third week of Washington State's Stay Home, Stay Healthy mandate. Many people are wondering, is it working? Yes, it looks promising and hopefully we will begin to see the rate of infections going down in the next week or two. If you look at the daily rising numbers of cases and deaths due to COVID-19 statewide, it may not seem so. The number of cases and deaths statewide continue to rise and many people are continuing to get infected. Exposure to COVID-19 takes a while, sometimes up to 2 weeks, before symptoms show up. I've received many questions about this topic and will answer those questions to the best of my ability.

Are we going to be in the clear by May 4 and return to life as we knew it before COVID-19? I'm hopeful we will begin moving back toward 'normal' by then. While we may see some restrictions ease I expect to see guidance on social distancing, and hand hygiene before touching your face continue. The actual 'day' we can breathe a sigh of relief is so hard to predict because even when the rate of new infections starts going down, it's not the right time to let our guard down. Researchers are hard at work to develop a vaccine and test out treatment options. The sacrifices we are making today gives us the time to work on these.

How many people have recovered from COVID-19 in Thurston County? Of the first 72 reported cases, 45 have recovered and were released from isolation. Twelve have been hospitalized (some are hospitalized out of county), many have recovered and have been discharged, and unfortunately, we have had one death. It is important to note the numbers we report every day are only for county residents tested with a positive result. Not everyone who is infected with COVID-19 have symptoms or are tested. Most folks who are infected have little to mild symptoms. Statistically only about 20% are sick enough to seek health care, are tested, or are hospitalized.

Why is masking being recommended now? Masking can protect others around you, in case you are infected and do not have symptoms or are just coming down with symptoms. Masking can also protect you by reminding you not to touch your face. As we know more about the disease and how it spreads, the possibility of people of all ages being infected and not showing signs and symptoms is becoming an increasing concern. This is also the reason why social distancing (staying 6 feet away) is so important. Make sure to change your homemade cloth mask daily and whenever it becomes wet or contaminated. Keep the inside free from contamination. Please reserve medical grade disposable masks for health care workers to use while taking care of COVID-19 infected patients.

Where do people with confirmed COVID-19 cases live? Honestly, they are from every single city and town in Thurston County, more populated cities have more cases. Many of you have also asked where they have been. These folks live in our neighborhoods and shop in local stores. The information we have is only from cases that are known. There are hundreds of other cases out there that may have the infection and not even know it. Trying to only go places that are not "listed" gives a false sense of security and is why we are recommending universal social distancing and hand hygiene. This is what will work to prevent infection.

Shouldn't everyone be tested? The tests are accurate when done properly and at the right time after exposure. Testing resources are improving but continue to be limited. Testing does not protect you from becoming infected later. We continue to recommend social distancing and hand hygiene for prevention regardless of test results while the disease is active in our community.

You can control your own environment and your own risk for exposure. Remain 6 feet away from anybody. Wash your hands before touching your face. Stay Home. Stay healthy.

Thank you for all the sacrifices you are making to help us get through this crisis.

In gratitude,

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